



SALTON SEA ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION PLAN

THE QSA AND THE CALIFORNIA RESOURCES AGENCY

Background

The Colorado River is the source of much of Southern California's water supply. It has been allocated among western states through a series of laws, court decisions and agreements dating back to the 1920s. Until recently, Arizona and Nevada did not use their full share of Colorado River water, and California was allowed to use water that was not used by these states. Due to growth in these other states, California has been required to reduce its use of Colorado River water to its basic allocation.

This situation set the stage for the Quantification Settlement Agreement (QSA) and the related issues at the Salton Sea.

The Why, How and What of the QSA

During the mid 1990s, many discussions took place throughout the California water community about how best to reduce California's use of Colorado River water.

In 2003 an intensive mediation effort was undertaken with state policy makers and the water agencies that use Colorado River water, as well as the United States Department of the Interior. After intensive negotiations, legislation emerged to implement the QSA and provide for restoration of the Salton Sea. The Governor signed the three bills comprising the implementing legislation on September 29, 2003, and the QSA was signed in October 2003 by the local, state and federal agencies.

The Legislation and the State's Responsibility

The implementing legislation for the Colorado River QSA and Salton Sea restoration is contained in three bills from the 2003 Legislative Session: Senate Bill 277 (Ducheny), Senate Bill 317 (Kuehl), Senate Bill 654 (Machado), and as amended by Senate Bill 1214 (Kuehl) in 2004.

The legislation provided a framework for the local water agencies – Coachella Valley Water District, Imperial Irrigation District, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and San Diego County Water Authority – to sign the QSA. As part of this legislation, the State assumed responsibility for mitigating environmental impacts of the QSA water transfers in excess of the \$133 million to be covered by the local agencies. Most of these impacts are associated with the Salton Sea and its immediate vicinity.

Environmental Restoration

Under the provisions of the legislation, the State is charged with the far-reaching task of "restoration of the Salton Sea ecosystem and the permanent protection of the wildlife dependent on that ecosystem." The Secretary for Resources is to prepare an ecosystem restoration plan in consultation with a legislatively mandated advisory

committee and to prepare a programmatic Environmental Impact Report. The reports are to be submitted to the Legislature by the end of 2006.

The major elements of the Salton Sea Environmental Restoration Plan include: water management infrastructure, habitat restoration, water quality management, and air quality management.

Water Management Infrastructure includes considering different configurations of barriers to partition the Salton Sea, potential water conveyance structures (pipelines, canals), and water treatment facilities.

Habitat Restoration focuses on maintaining diverse and sustainable populations of fish and wildlife, ensuring different habitats in the Salton Sea, and integrating these aspects with on-shore habitats.

Water Quality Management focuses on salinity levels, nutrient removal, and selenium removal.

Air Quality Management includes the elimination of air quality impacts from Restoration Plan actions, maintaining existing air monitoring stations, and performing further air quality data collection.

Where Are We Going?

The State is vigorously working to meet the requirements of the implementing legislation and the California Environmental Quality Act, and will select a preferred alternative only after completion of a **full and open public process**. This effort will build upon and utilize previously performed work – **it will not “re-invent the wheel.”** The study will identify ways to permanently protect the wildlife dependent on the Salton Sea ecosystem, including bird populations of state, national, and international importance.

Together with all of the Salton Sea stakeholders, the State is working to permanently protect the Salton Sea’s important wildlife resources and ensure successful QSA implementation.

Ecosystem Restoration Plan Implementation Schedule

- Over the summer of 2005, the alternatives will be defined and evaluated
- Draft EIR published in early 2006
- Final EIR published in fall 2006
- Notice of Determination in December 2006
- Secretary for Resources submits plan to Legislature by December 31, 2006
- **Decision by State Legislature**

Send your comments to:

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